The Rev. Suzanne M. Coles
CCR Homily
Proper 17A
August 30, 2026

+ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Over the last few years, and since the Covid pandemic, the communications field has grown exponentially. And while electronic and virtual mediums continue to surge, more traditional forms of communication have also seen some resurgence. Some of us have reclaimed the old arts of letter writing, and handwritten notes. Last month for my birthday, I received just two handwritten cards, and how I treasured them! What personal care expressed by the writer, and a great source of affection for the recipient. Knowing that someone took the time and effort to produce such a thoughtful communication.

Hearing St. Paul's letter to the Romans today, with this awareness, adds an additional later of meaning to his words, I think. And I want to go back to the beginning, because it sets the tone. This is how he opened the letter to the Romans – the very beginning. Now picture it, handwritten on papyrus, being read aloud, to a mostly illiterate community. So listen to these words, with that context in mind…

"I Paul, a servant (slave) of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God…"

- Servant of Jesus Christ
- Called to be an Apostle and
- Set apart for the sake of the Gospel.

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That is St. Paul's articulation of his role, and also his identity. And thusly, his hope for everyone in the community….the fullness of stature to which they will learn and evolve….And he goes on to further open the letter with this greeting….

Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ…

Grace to you*.** Meaning, I wish you God's unmerited favor. Undeserved and unearned. Forgiveness of your sins, enlightenment of your minds, stirring of your hearts, strengthening of your wills. All of this, is my wish for you. ***Grace to you. Even more***,*** St. Paul gets into the meat of this letter with an offering of thanksgiving. He gives thanks for the community's proclaiming of their faith, not ashamed to share the gospel. Reminding them that God's salvation is for everyone.

Now when we get to today's Chapter 12, with two main directives… ***Let love be genuine***…and… **Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.**

It adds some deeper meaning I believe. Because they know and can acknowledge that they are the recipients of God's unmerited favor, his extraordinary grace, they also must know that it is for all. To be shared and proclaimed and trusted widely. Because they have received God's grace, their own love must be genuine. Unconditional we would say. And they also must accept that though there be evil in the world, they must not be overwhelmed by it. In fact, **God's grace** and **unconditional love** empower them to overcome evil with good. Note overcome is a verb there.

Overcome evil!

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This is always the Christian belief. Good overcomes evil. God's goodness will reign. Even when we can't see it or feel it, this is our ultimate belief and hope.

In our own context today, with what seems like endless turmoil, economic and social injustices, it IS so tempting to be overwhelmed, and think that evil is winning. But on the contrary, St. Paul reminds us.. we are **set apart** for the gospel. We are not to be consumed by the world's forces of evil. We are set apart to work, pray, and give for the kingdom of God. And the Kingdom of God is a place where the needs of every living creature are satisfied, all human beings are free, and have pure dignity. The Kingdom is a place where God's abundance and provision reign. And it is so much closer than we may actually think. Because, you see, we have the power to help make the Kingdom come. With our voice, and with our actions.

On Tuesday last, the nation gasped at the death of Dolly Parton. She is iconic of course to the Nashville music scene, but also to the ideals that we work for, as Americans and modern-day disciples. Some of my clergy colleagues have already proposed that she be added to TEC's Lesser Feasts and Fasts calendar, as a modern saint! And she is certainly quite a role model. Overcoming poverty, using her God-given talent for the greater good, fidelity in marriage, giving back to the

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community. Her Imagination Library! Believing in the worth of every person, no matter how poor or rich. Recognizing from a very early age that she had been "anointed" by God for a special purpose. And using her unique platform to speak truth to power, promote light, and help people. All with lots of sequins and her signature six-inch heels!

St. Paul did it with great intimacy, Dolly did it with great flare, and we can all **do it** in our own unique way. By listening first for the voice of the One who calls us each by name, and is the author of our salvation. In these final days of summer, may we truly listen, as we prepare to once again take up our role as ambassadors for Christ. Remember again, St. Paul's greeting….

Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ…
And overcome evil with good.

+ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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